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ABSTRACT

Problems facing distance open learning in the developing Asian countries were examined, and possible solutions were proposed. The prominent features of distance and open learning in 10 developed nations were identified. Existing distance education (DE) systems in developing nations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America were reviewed and found to share the following features: inadequate finances; poor communication and infrastructural facilities; the absence of clear governmental policies; limited use of audiovisual media; a shortage of experts to develop multimedia courses; a lack of financial and academic autonomy for distance teaching institutions; and distance education's low social and academic status because of quality issues. The review indicated that blindly copying Western models of DE is more dangerous than evolving indigenous models for developing countries. The future of DE in developing countries was shown to depend primarily on the ability of DE institutions to respond to the specific needs of learners at different levels. The following actions were recommended for improving DE in developing Asian countries: (1) review existing institutional structures and governance; (2) evaluate existing methods of teaching and learning and existing support systems; and (3) recognize the potential of information communication technologies and evolve appropriate policies for distance open learning. (Contains 30 references.) (MN)

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DISTANCE OPEN LEARNING IN THE DEVOLOPING ASIAN COUNTRIES: PROBLEMS AND POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

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A Global View

The phenomenal growth of distance and open learning systems all over the world has drastically changed the educational scenario everywhere today. The conventional notions about teaching-learning are being replaced very fast by new ideas and strategies, thanks to the revolutionary changes continuously taking place in the media and communication. Since the concept of education as investment is also steadily gaining ground, even the poorest countries are slowly turning their attention to the educational needs of their respective populations in order to survive and develop. Distance education has been viewed by many as a viable strategy to achieve the national educational goals quickly and at low costs.

At present, there are 1300 distance and open learning institutions of different types and sizes located in 127 countries. The number of distance learners is approximately 90 million at the higher education level. It was expected to reach 90 million by 2000 A.D and 120 million by 2025 A.D (Dhanarajan 1996), but the available data pertains mostly to institutions funded and/or recognized by the governments and the public bodies. If we add to these the private and unregistered institutions and the students learning through them, the figures will be still higher and the target of 2025 A.D. might have already been achieved.

In India alone as per the latest data available in 2001, there are about 70 distance teaching units called Correspondence/Distance Education Departments located within conventional universities, 9 State Open Universities and 1 National Open University (AIU Handbook 2001). Over 1,000,000 students would be on the rolls of these institutions, and the number of State open universities would have gone up. At the school level, the National Open School offered education to about 60,000 students spread across the country (Chakraborty K, 1994). But now if offers education to more than 500,000 students at the secondary school level throughout India. Besides these, distance teaching programmes are offered by some private institutions and television companies (e.g. ZED programmes by Zee TV, the management programmes offered by Jain TV, Sun TV and others). Roughly about 20 % of the student population at the higher education level is already taken care of by the correspondence/distance/open learning systems in India.

The expansion of the distance and open learning system in other countries both developed and developing, has established beyond any doubt the fact that this system is going to play a very important role in the 21st century.The present dominance of campus based higher education may become a thing of the past perhaps by the

middle of the next century, if not earlier than that. Possibly the cheaper of the two systems may take place faster than expected, and it may lead. to new structures of educational institutions and new strategies which may be used by both campus based and distance mode institutions. If that is the trend, then, what will be the implications of it for the developing countries?

The implications could be many, but the most important of them will be for the economy, sovereignty and the culture of the people of the developing world. How the growth of distance and open learning will impact the areas seemingly unrelated to education in the developing nations can be accounted for by analyzing the nature of demands made by the system on the resources of a country, the curriculum, methodology and the managerial process as a whole. Besides these, the cost factor which is usually assumed to be cheaper in the distance education system plays a major role in promoting the system in place of face to face campus based education.

Distance Education in the Developed World

Distance education scenario in the developed world presents a comparatively bright and promising picture for the 21st century. The Open University, UK for example, has become the country's largest university which now plays a central role in the credit transfer and award validation mechanisms that knit British higher education and training together (John Daniel, 1995). In general, the European Distance Education Network (EDEN) shows that the European countries have firmly recognized the Distance and Open Learning system as part of their educational enterprise. North America, Australia and Japan have developed their own distance teaching - learning systems in many forms flexible enough to cater to the varied needs of their different learner clientele (Sewart 1995). Advancement in communication devices which are widely used by the distance and open learning institutions in the developed countries make the individualized teaching-learning possible there. Besides, the well established academic traditions and a wider provision for basic primary and secondary education have created a strong base for extending higher, vocational and unconventional educational programmes to those segments of adult populations who have limited or no access to campus based face-to-face education in the different areas at the tertiary level. The emergence of virtual universities and the new learning spaces are expected to effect another revolution in education soon (Peters 2001).

A brief overview of the prominent features of distance and open learning scenario in some of the advanced countries would give us a better understanding of the situation in those countries. For example, in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Norway, Sweden, Spain, the United States of America, Canada, Japan and Australia the distance/open learning systems operate very effectively for the following reasons:

* Adult learners with an appreciable degree of basic/primary/secondary education.
* Medium of instruction is mostly though the mother tongue of the learner
* technology and communication facilities
* Availability and accessibility of well-equipped, advanced institutions with clear vision and mission statements

* Adequate resource mobilization
* Thoughtful and committed academic leadership
* Flexible and need based curriculum
* Committed and/or trained, qualified staff
* Thorough planning and implementation of educational programmes
* Adequate and efficient student support services
* Continuous and systematic monitoring, review and evaluation
* Political will (which is crucial) to back up the projects and institutions

Historically, the advanced countries in the West and also Japan had developed a very good network of communication systems. In the 19th century, locomotives, road transport, steam navigation, telegraphs and telephones speeded up the process of transportation and communication in Europe. The industrial revolution made it necessary for the nations to improve transport to carry out their economic, trading, commercial and military activities successfully. As a byproduct of these, experiments with new ways of teaching-learning started, though slowly and on a limited scale. Humanistic education was still struggling against the centuries old sectarian-religious dogmas in the 19th century when the campus based classroom teaching was emerging as the dominant mode.

Isaac Pitman, in a way planted the seed of the modem correspondence education when he started offering postal tuition on short-hand in 1840 in Britain. Pitman would not have imagined that after a century his small educational venture would grow into a significant mode of education spread in many forms in the United States of America, Australia, Western Europe and Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Since campus-based, classroom teaching was confined to the upper classes and the middle classes in the industrialized nations, the forceful demand for education from the working classes and other deprived sections of the society had to be met through some means. After the second world war, the demand was felt all the more urgently because the issue had a potential to disturb, if not overthrow the existing social order, and the ruling classes could ill afford such an eventuality that would lead to social unrest.

The concept of the 'welfare state' was gaining importance, presumably with the approval of the ruling classes, throughout western Europe in order to contain the spread of social revolutions which had already covered one third of the globe in the late 1940s. As a part of the welfare state concept, new ways of meeting the increasing educational demands of the people were also to be sought. At the higher educational level, the open university system became the flagship to meet the challenge.

The history of the Establishment of the Open University in the United Kingdom in 1969 makes it abundantly clear that the labour government's policy to expand higher education through the Open University was the least 'revolutionary' in the classical sense of the phrase. Nevertheless the project had to be pushed through with skill and determination because of the perceived social threat in it by the conservatives (Perry 1976). It is a different matter that later on, the Thatcherite consevatives too found it useful to ward off dangers from the lower classes demanding more of their share in the educational domain. The Open University is an example of how a harmless

palliative can be projected as a revolutionary measure by the left of the center politicians which in turn would be perceived as a threat and therefore opposed by the die hard conservatives. Neither of the stances did substantially alter the role of open universities and distance education, as is evidenced by the experience of many countries in the advanced world.

Educational Concerns of the Developing World

An analysis of the socio-cultural contexts in which the terms 'distance' and 'open' education were originally coined and used would show that the advanced western countries conceived distance education concepts on the basis of their technological growth, cultural heritage and academic traditions. Not that there are no conflicts among the educational philosophies of western countries with regard to distance education. The ongoing debates in the developed world on the sociological and pedagogic implications of technology based teaching-learning, the philosophies of western countries with regard to distance learning curricula, the ideological biases in course contents, the cost factor, marketability to educational enterprises and other issues have much relevance of distance education in the developing world. However, the level of the debates as such shows that the concerns of distance educators in the developing countries are more at the. basic level. The concerns are such as the following:

i) Can some sort of education reach the people ?
ii) Can the shrinking educational budgets meet the minimum infrastructural requirements?
iii) Will there be an appreciable degree of success in the course completion rates?
iv) Are their job opportunities for those who complete their studies through distance mode?
v) Are there enough arrangements to provide education to those who want it, irrespective of its use value?

These and similar issues dominate the thinking of the policy makers and administrators in the developing countries.

Surveying the distance education scenario in a number of developing countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Manjulika and Reddy (1996) observe the following common features:

* Inadequate finances
* Poor communicational and infrastructural facilities
* Absence of clear governmental policies
* Limited use of audio-visual media
* Shortage of experts to develop multimedia courses
* Lack of financial and academic autonomy for distance-teaching institutions
* Low social and academic status of distance education because of quality issues.

Individual studies on the specific problems of developing countries have been studied by a number researchers (See: Arger 1990; Holmberg 1989, Peter Smith et al

1987). However, the conclusions and generalizations which are to be derived from the specific contexts are very significant for this discussion. What appears to be quite obvious from the point of view of academic research becomes important when looked at from the political, cultural and sociological angles of the current distance education scenario.

Some research studies have posed the questions related to distance education in the developing countries frankly and directly (Arger 1993; Villorel 1995; Oliveira and Rumble 1991). Others have given a descriptive analysis of the needs, issues, possibilities, challenges, etc. of the developing countries practicing distance education. But the descriptive details in themselves are significant. The overall aims of distance education curricula, the characteristic features of the students clientele, the infrastructural facilities such as buildings, electricity, postal services, transport, telecommunications, the television - radio network etc. and the human resources to use the facilities, especially the media technology when made available, are the key factors which must engage the attention of distance educators in the developing world. These factors have utmost significance in the context of proposing distance education as the viable alternative strategy to tackle the educational problems at the national levels in many developing countries. But what does actually happen in the developing world?

The Open University and the Developing World

The success of the British Open University in the seventies obviously acted as the inspiration for policy makers in many developing countries to establish their own open universities or distance teaching units. In India, for example, the thinking of establishing an open university at the national level had been there for a decade before it actually materialized in 1985 with the establishment of Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) (Parthasarthy Committee Report 1974). Although the Andhra Pradesh Open.University (now Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University) was established in 1982, the blue print prepared for a full fledged open university was given some kind of practical shape only in the establishment of IGNOU which is broadly modeled after the Open University, UK. In 1974, i.e., five years after the OUUK came into existence, Pakistan established the Allama Iqbal University (AIOU) at Islamabad. The AIOU has been guided by the consultants from the UK from its inception.

Thailand established its two major open universities Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) and Ramkamhaeng University (RU) in 1978 and 1971 respectively. Although Thailand too got the inspiration from the success story of the OUUK, it has deviated a lot in adapting the open university system to suit its local needs. Sri Lanka (1981) Bangladesh (1988) Malaysia (1980) Hong Kong (1990) Singapore (1991) and South Korea (1983) are some of other important examples of countries having drawn inspiration from the British Open University.

However, the British Open University itself was the result of Herold Wilson's inspiration that he got from the former USSR when he visited it in 1956 and saw the tremendous success of distance education of a different sort which was centrally planned and implemented by the Soviet State to meet the educational demands of the

country. The East European countries, the former German Democratic Republic, Cuba, Nicaragua, Zimbabwe and Tanzania are other notable examples which have modeled their educational policies and practices on the basis of the experience of the USSR. In the post-Mao peoples' Republic of China distance education got an impetus through radio and television broadcasting. Central Radio and Television University (1978). CRTVU is one of the biggest institutions in the world which provide education to workers who need to update their technical and vocational skills.

Distinction or the Divide?

What really distinguishes the distance education of the developed countries from that of the developing world is the overall aim set for it. In the developed countries the broad aim is to provide education to individuals who need it at different levels with different individual needs. In the developing countries the aim becomes a collective one such as nation building, eradication of illiteracy, rural development, health education, women's education, tribal education, education of the socially disadvantaged etc., besides the usual academic, technical and vocational programmes. The very magnitude of the aims/goals set before distance education in the developing countries makes the educational operations very complex and demanding. The potential of distance education is stretched too far to meet every educational need which has not been met so far. This has put tremendous pressure on the systems of distance education which are yet to take firm roots.

In one way, distance education is perceived as the solution for all the shortcomings of conventional, face-to-face education in the developing countries. In another way, it is projected as the cost effective, and therefore a cheap way of meeting the demands of education. In the process, too little money is allocated to meet the educational needs. As a matter of fact, much of the educational crises in the developing world can be traced to the same economic arguments. Because the educational budgets in these countries have been usually small, the standard and the quality of education too have not been high. The spread of literacy and the expansion of education at different levels have suffered precisely because of the meagre allocation made to all the educational projects. This fact is usually ignored by those who criticize the face-to-face. education and attribute every educational fiasco to it. If the funding of education is rationalized on a scientific basis, perhaps distance education could meet the demands much faster and more efficiently than the lumberous, rigid and expensive structures of campus based education. Inspite of all the possible hurdles, distance education has been spreading rapidly.

There is no reason to believe that the hurdles cannot be overcome. What is really needed is a systematic appraisal of the impact of distance education in the developing countries over the decades to find out the strength and the weaknesses for the systems as obtaining in many countries. The weaknesses, once identified would persuade the practitioners to go for remedial measures. If remedial measures are not taken consciously with sufficient political will, then, there is every possibility of turning the system into a self-serving agent which may serve the interest of a few individuals but the system as such will not achieve the intended goals of nations and peoples.

Lack of Resources : African Scenario

Paucity of material and human resources has in general affected the practice of distance education in every developing country that has not been able to achieve its educational goals. Here I will present a typical case. Ethiopia started its distance education project in the early 1960s. But it did not have either the necessary infrastructural facilities nor the expertise in designing, developing and implementing its educational programme.

During 1962-64 the Distance Education Division (DED) invited an American Dean of the Extension Division of Nebraska University as a consultant to help design the courses to serve the needs of Ethiopia. The American, while doing the 'needful' for Ethiopians, actually imported the secondary level courses from Nebraska, the USA. As one could except, the courses did not meet the requirements of the students of Ethiopia. After evaluating this unrewarding exercise, the American Dean, and local experts tried to develop courses which would suit the local needs. However, after exploring the 'possibilities' of developing the local need based courses, the attempt, along with the idea was given up because of "lack of resources and expertise in distance education" (Inquay, S. 1992).

Although two staff members of DED had been sent to the National Extension College (NEC) and the International Extension College (IEC) London, to get the necessary training to develop the relevant courses in Ethiopia, on their turn the staff members did not make use of their training of whatever kind, because the university which arranged for their training did not encourage them. As a result Ethiopia has not been able to make any headway in establishing a distance education system, nor had it succeeded in creating a good department of distance education either. The Distance Education Division (DED) of Ethiopia is presently "passing through a period of doldrums which seems to be the result of long neglect, under-financing, and under-staffing", beside, suffering from lack of good leadership (Inquay, S. 1992).

Ethiopia is an extreme example, but the features of the Ethiopian case are generalisable to describe the situation in many a developing country which does not have the necessary resources and a reasonable degree of expertise.

Kenya, one of the richest countries in Africa, has not been able to articulate its educational needs with a future perspective. As a result, it had not made available sufficient funds and human resources to create a relevant, indigenous model of its own to serve the needs of Kenyan students who otherwise cannot have access to face to face education. In the absence of strong governmental efforts to meet the demands in this area, private and foreign agencies readily step in to take advantage of the opportunities. And that is exactly what has happened in Kenya too.

For many years, private, mainly British correspondence colleges have offered distance education courses to health workers and school teachers in Kenya (Holmberg, 1990). When efforts were made by the State, distance education in

Kenya looked up to the future, although a number of factors related to resource mobilization hamper the development of the system at the national level . Limited electricity supply, poor postal services expensive equipments used by untrained staff in non-professional way and a large body of untrained teachers create problems for a healthy and faster development of the system. Although competent academics are available in Kenya, their number appears to be comparatively small and the distribution of this small number of competent people across the distance teaching units may not lead to effective utilization of their talents because of the generally unprofessional environment which, of course, is not a unique privilege of Kenya alone. Added to these, is the problem of language as a medium of instruction. Although English is one of the two official languages of Kenya playing a dominant role in administration, education, journalism and business, the mastery of English by a majority of Kenyan teachers is regrettably low. Poor mastery of English which is the medium of instruction, slow administrative process and lack of resources inevitably slow down the speed of distance education in Kenya, a country, rich in its oil and natural resources, unlike Ethiopia.

Zambia has made tremendous advancement in distance education in recent years. However, inadequate material and human resources negatively affect the quality of the programmes as well as the learning process. While acknowledging the achievements of Distance education in Zambia, Mulenga (1987) identified "some difficulties, particularly in course development and student services which reduce the quality of the distance education offering". Zambia, though a small country as compared to Kenya, Ethiopia and India, it can however, boast of greater success in its endeavor to promote distance education because its rational resource allocation, concern for quality and care for setting achievable goals and proper planning.
In general, distance education in African countries suffers from the same malnutrition that impoverishes educational institutions in other developing countries: shortage of resources.

Analyzing the trends in teacher education in the third world, Gary Coldwin and Som Naidu (1989) identify population growth and the shrinking resources for primary education as two of the other important reasons for the poor quality of education, including non-availability of trained teachers
"particularly in the rural areas where the majority of people reside" which make the practical operations difficult and complex. The perennial contradiction in implementing the educational programmes in the developing countries, thus, is that of greater needs of education at every level and the grossly inadequate resources to meet them.

Latin America

Latin America had been struggling at least for two decades till the mid eighties to come to grips with its own problems with respect to deciding on the suitable models of distance education. Rumble (1985) observed the peculiarities of the Latin American situation in the early eighties and noticed doubts being raised by the Latin American educators about the suitability of the-British Open University model in the severely under-funded, poverty stricken and illiterate nations usually governed by authoritarian regimes. The most significant problems adversely affecting the Latin

American distance education have been shortage of resources to create, infrastructural facilities, shortage of trained educational managers to plan and operate a distance education system, and the highly politicized nature of university structures which make innovative educational projects very fragile. Although doubts were expressed about the future of distance education even in the eighties, the concept has taken firm roots and in certain respects it has contributed significantly as a model to the developing world which we shall discuss later

Theses on Distance Education for the Developing World

After having considered some significant experiences of the practice of distance education in the developing world, one could advance the-following theses which may draw the attention of distance educators:

1. There are greater perils and dangers involved in blindly copying any western models of distance education than in evolving indigenous models for the developing countries even if the latter meant absence of theory and experience.
2. Indigenous models, though very difficult to evolve quickly, once created will have greater relevance, and strength than the copied or adopted models.
3. It is possible to create a variety of models which will be equally effective in different specific social-economic and cultural contexts irrespective of success models recommended by the 'experienced' distance educators.
4. The future of distance education in the developing countries would depend more on the ability of distance teaching institutions to respond to the specific needs of learners at different levels and less on their resourcefulness to catch up with their counterparts in the developed world.

Let me substantiate the above with some evidence.

Asian Experience

Indonesia offers another classic example of a developing country which got inspiration from the successful western models of distance education but in the practice of distance education got trapped, because of blind adaptation of success models. Indonesia has its strong traditions of teaching-learning which resemble any other Asiatic academic tradition of respecting the teacher and expecting from him knowledge and wisdom to flow. Besides this reverential treatment of teachers and teaching, the low literacy rate and strong oral traditions do not adequately prepare the teachers as well as the learners to benefit from distance education as practiced in the west.

The first obvious mistake that every developing country, including Indonesia makes is to ignore the ground reality where too many incomparable variables distract the smooth functioning of a model which might have been a success in a developed country. In the context of distance education, the concept and strategies of self-learning have to be applied cautiously and imaginatively. Without the psychological and cultural preparedness of both the teachers and the learners, distance teaching and self-learning will not be successful. The necessary preparedness does not come to them without changing their social, economic and cultural orientation to the extent

necessary to receive the concept and adapt it to suit their own conditions. Raden Dunbar (1991) while addressing some of the above mentioned issues in Indonesia observes that the "fundamental cause of distance education failure in Indonesia has been the adoption of western models, without adaptation to suit the acculturised behaviours of Indonesian teachers and learners".

Indonesia has a large population, strong Islamic culture, oral traditions of teaching which hold the teachers with high respect and view learners as 'receivers' of knowledge. It has high population growth rate, low literacy rate, limited access to sophisticated technology and a fragile democratic policy. Obviously, it cannot be expected to succeed in practising distance education in the way it is done in Europe or North America. Nor can it increase its educational budget to the extent necessary to provide resources for face-to-face education to meet the educational needs of the people entirely. The possible alternative would be the creative adaptation of some successful model of distance education. But Indonesia went for *adoption* rather than *adaptation* when it established its Open University in 1984 the Universities Terbuka (UT). The obvious choice of a model for UT was the UK Open University.

Naturally the UTs strategies to impart distance education were based on the strategies of UKOU. UT started its activities with a big bang, admitting 60,000 students for its courses in 1984. And in 1990 about 270,000 students enrolled for the various courses of UT. But the success rate of course completion was anything but satisfactory. The University was beset with all kinds of problems and difficulties in carrying out its plan, particularly in the crucial areas of course development and course delivery. The reasons for the unrewarding exercise are not far to seek (Dunbar, 1991).

Any developing country going in for adopting a foreign, especially a western success model is bound to find itself in a tricky, and difficult situation, if it fails to adapt the model to suit its own specific situation and plan its activities with a strong sense of realism. Because of uncritical enthusiasm, the planners of distance education in the developing world want to do things in their respective countries in the way the western institutions have done and succeeded, forgetting the latter's specific concerns, resources, experience and traditions. This uncritical enthusiasm of the planners of the developing world may have three sources: (i) a genuine lack of understanding about the implications of adopting western models, (ii) a desire to please the political bosses by doing something visible for political and publicity purposes and/or (iii) the vested interests of some key players who deliberately do things which would suit their personal interest rather than the interests of the institution and the learners. One or all the above can be seen operating behind the planning and execution of distance education projects in the developing countries. Indonesia too must have had its share of this sad experience.

The planners of UT indeed, heavily depended on the western models and the western consultants from the UK, Canada and America. UT's experience in adopting the UKOU strategies in course development and course delivery, though sadly disappointing, has a few valuable lessons to offer to the developing countries which would like to start their own distance teaching. Commenting on the failure of the strategies adopted by the UT for its course development and delivery Dunbar (1991) says:

> The assumption appears to have been that Indonesian distance teachers and learners would behave in much the same way as their western counterparts when faced with teaching and learning via mediation, must eventually be mastering the technique of education without a direct and continuous personal relationship with a teacher.

The assumption was obviously proven wrong, because of the fundamental variation in culture of teaching-learning between the country which created the model and the country which adopted it. Besides the cultural implications, one could easily discern the other possible reasons: variations in the infrastructural facility, access to technology and provision for a strong student support service. A team of evaluators from UNESCO - ICDE studied the myriad problems faced by the UT in 1990. Summarizing the situation at the UT the report by the UNESCO - ICDE team says:

> UT would appear to be beset by a daunting number of problems of a fundamental nature that will require some dramatic, if not traumatic, changes to be made before it can be accepted by the community as a viable alternative to traditional forms of education. The educational philosophy and the current organizational arrangements that have been designed to support it are clearly not working.

Similar discoveries will be made sooner or later about the non-working models and strategies adopted by many other developing countries, including India. The most important lesson from these experiences for the developing world is that the blind copying of any successful western model of distance education would not work in the developing world but, which is much more alarming, would discredit the very philosophy of distance education in the situations dominated by traditional notions of education, and thus hamper its growth for a long time to come.

Strengths of indigenous models

As a refreshing contrast to the experience of Indonesia and some other developing countries, the Latin American experience is one of self confidence and independent thinking. Although many Latin American experiments with distance education had to meet with disappointing experiences and failures even, the grim determination with which some of the Latin American distance teaching institutions have struggled to establish themselves as relevant models in their own right and in their own soil must inspire other parts of the developing world in a positive way. It took about 10 - 15 years for some leading institutions in Latin America to make their presence felt but the efforts were worth making. Oliveira and Zumble (1991) in their review of distance education in Latin America recognize a number of strengths and also point out the weaknesses and constraints of the system of distance education.

The major strength of distance education in Latin America is to be seen in that it "has developed its own forms of distance education to confront realities and problems which are popular to the region" (Oliveira and Rumble, 1991). The indigenous forms of distance education, school equivalency programmes, post secondary in-service

teacher education, university extension education, mass higher education, rural community education, and many developmental programmes through distance teaching. The progress in these areas had, of course, been made, despite stiff resistance from the conservative circle of academics and Policy makers as also the problems caused by paucity of resources, experience etc, which lead to the collapse of a number of programmes and projects.

But the success of indigenous models outshines the failures precisely because of the Latin American determination to find its own solutions to its problems and resist the temptation to imitate the European and North American models blindly. In other words, inspite of hardships and some failures, Latin American region has succeeded in creating the suitable forms of distance education through experiment and adaptation rather than adoption of successful models alien to its own reality. This creativity and adaptation can be observed in a number of aspects of the system, including the use of pedagogy and technology.Oliveira and Rumble observe:

> The successful transfer of the concept rested in part on the use of communications technologies which already existed in the region and in part on the decision by the planners to adopt an essentially conservative approach to academic policy, in marked contrast to the British Model.....
> ..... In general, the regional development of distance education at the higher education level have been a product of the Latin American situation and not of externally imported technologies, policies and structures.

No wonder, the Latin American region has been able to show to the world such successful institutions as UNA of Venezuela and UNED of Costa Rica. The mass education programmes organized for the poor peasants by Paulo Freire in Columbia has inspired a number of other countries in the region. The potential of radio had been particularly appreciated by the Latin American institutions in Colombia, Brazil and Nicaragua. Nicaragua's mass educational campaigns in 1979 and the early 1980s soon after the Sandinista revolution were remarkable successes. Cuba has been using distance education as an ideal complement to its face-to-face education system since 1978.

From among the Asian countries one could cite Thailand and China as two worthy examples of self-confidence and independent approach in practicing distance education in the forms and ways suitable to their respective situations.

From the above survey and analysis of the current practices of distance education in many parts of the world, it should be possible to draw certain conclusions which would have some lessons for the developing countries.

- Distance education will emerge as a major system in the developing world too in the years to come.
- The present practice of adopting the western models will not work in the developing world because of incompatible cultural variations and technological gaps.

- Any attempt to transplant western models in the developing countries will hamper the growth of the system by making it permanently dependent on western experts, technology and teaching-learning strategies.
- There is an urgency to rethink about the current strategies of course development and delivery in all the countries which, for some reason or other, have based their strategies on the western, particularly the British model.
- The use of technology needs to be decided on the basis of its access to institutions and learners in the developing countries.
- It is not always necessary to have sophisticated technology to establish successful distance education models in the developing countries.
- Instead of competing with the western models which need heavy investment and high technology, the developing countries should make use of their available resources to meet their specific educational demands.
- To make use of the available resources, the developing countries must develop self-confidence and acquire the ability to think independently when they plan and execute their distance education programmes.
- In order to acquire self-confidence and independent thinking, distance educators and policy makers must first study the history of distance education in the advanced countries and relate it to the social and political history of the relevant countries.
- The fixation about the successful western models and the obsession about the inevitability of sophisticated technology must be overcome and a fresh look must be taken at the need and feasibility aspects of large scale use of technology for educational purposes.
- If and when sophisticated technology is acquired by institutions in the developing countries, the use of it must be considered on the basis of its usability and accessibility from the institutional and students points of view.
- Once idigenous models take firm roots in the native soils of the developing countries, they would gradually emerge as competitors to the western models.
- If the indigenous models fail to take roots, in the era of globalization educational systems of the developing countries also will soon face the same fate faced by their economic and political institutions: invisible take over by the multinational and transnational companies backed by the political super powers.

The above conclusions may sound alarming or even far-fetched to those who have been habituated to looking at educational issues in isolation of economic, political and technological developments. But they are not. Distance education itself has become a global phenomenon and its developments have intimate relationship with the developments of global trends in economy and technology. Economic imperialism, political imperialism and technological imperialism have simultaneously forged an alliance with cultural imperialism of which educational imperialism is only a minor component.

The dilemma of the developing world is that it has not been able to resist the global onslaught of powerful economies without compromising their own economic interests and political sovereignty. Such compromises are justified by the rulers of

the poor nations in the name of 'integrating themselves' with the global economy. In fact, the term 'globalization' is a euphemism for opening the gates of every country to the economically powerful countries. This is not a voluntary welcome, but a compulsion for the weaker nations without which their very existence as nations would become difficult.

The same dilemma, and for the same reasons, is faced by the distance teaching institutions in developing world. It is not a matter of recognition, but a question of resolve that is needed to strengthen the educational models which grow in individual countries much in the same way one feels the need to protect the seeds and plants of different countries which are threatened and destroyed in their own native soils by the patent rights and GATT agreements signed in Uruguay but decided in Washington.

Possible solutions

The UNESCO document "World Declaration in Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century". Vision and Action" (1999) says:

- The universality of higher education implies that its purpose should be not only to train but to educate.
- The universality of higher education implies that it should have a function of vigilance and of consciousness-raising.
- The universality of higher education implies that it should have a guiding ethical role at a time of crisis of values. (p. 3)

The document further says:

> "**Quality** is inseparable from social relevance. The implication of the quality requirement and of policies aiming for a 'quality safeguard' approach is that improvements should be sought, at the same time, to each of the component parts of the institution and to the institution as an integral whole, functioning as a coherent system.
> The quality of higher education is dependent on:
> - the qualitiy of the staff, which implies: acceptable social and financial status; a will to reduce inequalities such as those relating to gender; a concern to manage staff in accordance with the merit principle and provide them with the in-service training they need in order to fulfil their role in a changing society; the establishment of incentives and structures to encourage researchers to work in multidisciplinary teams on thematic projects, thus breaking with the habit of exclusively solitary scientific work;..." (p. 5)

In order to create vigorous, indigenous models of open distance teaching institutions, one must recognise the pre-requisites. The most important pre-requisite in this context is the academic leadership. An enlightened academic leader can make an institution strong, stable and intellectually healthy even the midst of political

instability, crude bureaucratic interference in the self-governance of institutions and unrewarding governments.

But in a situation where every appointment of heads of institutions becomes a political appointment, it will be a far cry to ask for an entightened academic to become the President, the Rector or the Vice Chancellor of a distance teaching university without, in some way or the other, compromising his personal ethics, value system and scholarly pursuit. By some miracle, if some enlightend academic is appointed as a head of an Open University, then s/he will have to work through extremely complicated organisational structures, bureaucratic procedures and often unsuitable and unrealistic norms.

The new institutions may benefit, if they are initially headed and guided by such enlightened academic leaders. If the already established institutions have to change their course under some dynamic leaders, it may be very difficult for the leaders to alter the institutional structures and change the norms and rules in such a way to implement new policies. The vested interests would be too strong to be won over. Often they checkmate the leaders who attempt any change, and it may so happen that in the process, instead of facing the challenges the new leaders may decide to quit, much to the glee of the vested interests who may become stronger than before and reinforce the thinking within institutions that nothing can be done without their "blessings".

Such institutional curses get further strength from less efficient and self-serving institutional leaders when they become too cautious and worried about their "smooth sailing". Smooth sailing it may be for the pilot, but the institutional ship will have to sail through perpetual rough weather. This problem can be solved only through greater participation in the educational process by all the stake holders - a team currently treated with respect but actually smacks of commercialisation. Teachers, students and parents are the stake holders and the most potent agents of change. However, they need to become conscious of their role and power in shaping the policies and institutions of education.

The following need immediate attention of the institutional leaders who want to develop indigenous systems of DOL in the developing countries:

1. Reformulating the mission and the vision of the institutions;
2. A thorough and critical review of institutional structures and statuatory bodies that govern the universities/institutions;
3. An assessment and evaluation of the hitherto existing methods of teaching, delivery and support services;
4. Recognition of the changing physiognomy of DOL under the impact of Information and Communicational Technologies (ICT) and evolving clear policies of appropriate, affordable and usable ICT;
5. Retraining of the Academic and the non-academic staff working in institutions of DOL with a view to creating an environment where scholarly pursuits, academic excellence and intellectual adventures will

> command respect, instead of crude politicking, ignorance, manipulations and tunnel visions dictating terms to the intellectuals and professionals who are very few right now in the DOL institutions of the developing world.

The list will grow longer, but one has to prioritise and begin somewhere, instead of growning and pining endlessly. Let us look at the priorities listed above one by one.

1. Why to reformulate the missions?

What could be the need for reformulating the mission and the vision of an institution when both must have already been done at the times of their establishment? The answer is simple. Although the mission, if not the vision, of an institution is usually stated in fairly broad and general terms, the actualisation of it is a lengthy process. During the course of achieving its mission, the institution has to take into account the continuing charges that occur in the society and the institution itself. A few examples would explain this point better.
When Indira Gandhi National Open University was established in 1985, the Act of the University stated the mission in the form of numerous objectives such as:

- advance and disseminate learning and knowledge by a diversity of means;
- provide opportunities for higher education to a large segment of the population;
- encourage the open university and distance education systems of the country; and
- coordinate and determine the standards in such systems. (IGNOU, Twelth Convocation, Vice-Chancellor's Report, March 2001, p. 4)

However, the working group which submitted the Report to establish a National Open University in 1975 stated the following as objectives of the University:

> In a situation of this type , where the expansion of enrolments in higher education has to continue at a terrific pace and where available resources in terms of men and money are limited the obvious solution, if proper standards are to be maintained and the demand for higher education from different sections of the people is to be met, is to adopt the open university system with its provision of higher education of part-time are on time. The Group therefore recommends that the government of India should establish, as early as possible, a national open university by an act of parliament (G. Parthasarathy, Report of the Working Group 1974).

The Report which justified the establishment of a national open university identified a number of weaknesses in the correspondence education in India, and to overcome

those very weaknesses suggested the following to be the focal points in establishing the open university system in the country.

(1) The most crucial input, on which everything else would largely depend, is the preparation of proper reading material. While the contribution of audio-visual aids is not being denied, the written word continues to be the most potent instrument of education... it is, therefore recommended that the single most important step in setting up an open university in India should be the development of self-instructional materials which should be innovative on the one hand, and on the other hand should be written with a view to meeting the requirements of students...

(2) Following upon the above, it is necessary to set up a core group of about a dozen scholars of merit not only in the selected field of scholarship, but also in that of preparing reading material suitable for different levels of educational endeavour which would be covered in the early stages of the open university.

(3) In the light of the insurmountable difficulties involved in making audio-visual aids and other infrastructure facilities available to each student individually, it is suggested that a study centre be set up for every 700 students or so where tapes, records, library facilities and faculty guidance should be made available to students of that area...

(4) To start with, it is suggested that the open university may set up not less that 8 centres to enroll about 5000 students...

(5) While the vehicle of the curricular programmes of the University will be the reading material sent by post, broadcasts and telecasts, and the role of the teacher cannot be completely alienated. Some form of live contact with teachers will be a necessity.

(6) The organisation of the open university should be located in the Union Territory of Delhi and it should work in close collaboration with the universities and institutions of higher learning already in existence. This would have obvious advantage of avoiding the creation of library and other facilities separately for the open university (as quoted by P.R. Ramanujam, 1997).

One can easily see the change of focus in the mission of IGNOU in 2001. As one of the 11 mega universities of the world it has now 750000 students on its rolls with 44 regional centres 626 study centres 300 regular academic staff, 1500 regular non-teaching staff, 442 study centre co-ordinators 185 programme centre co-ordinators 21000 academic counsellors.

The university uses self instructional materials in print more than 1050 audio-programmes, 1100 video-programmes, telly-conferencing, a dedicated educational TV channel (Gyan Darshan), interactive radio counselling, computer based online programmes.

The UK Open University was established 1969 to give a second chance to the underprivileged classes to pursue higher education through distance mode. The strategies to be used at the initial stage of the university where: specially prepared materials, and radio-television broadcasts by the BBC. Over the years the UKOU has changed both its mission and the strategies of teaching/ learning.

When the FernUniversität Hagen, Germany, was established in 1974, it had the following goals:

- to provide extra places for school leavers;
- to develop a system of university continuing education;
- to reform university teaching.

As reported by Otto Peters, in June 1977 the FernUniversität was setting itself new and much more difficult goals:

- to demonstrate that German citizens would enrol in large numbers in a distance teaching university;
- to attract employed students,
- to produce printed learning materials that would not be criticised by other German academics;
- to award qualifications that would be accepted as on a par with other German universities;
- to achieve a throughput of graduates per professor and group of lecturers at least equal to that achieved by a professor and equal group of lecturers in a conventional university (Keegan 1982; p. 92-3, as quoted in Keegan 1994, pp. 245-46).

In all the examples cited above we could notice that the missions are necessarily general, and they are to be achieved over a period of decades and even centuries. But the institutions concerned must state their specific goals and objectives from time to time in achievable operational terms. The priorities for DOL institutions in the 1970s were to:

a) reach the learners in large numbers,

b) use the new audio-visual media along with print,

c) demonstrate the cost-effectiveness of their programmes in comparison to that of the campus based institutions and

d) establish their academic status or parity of esteem with the campus based, face to face institutions.

This trend changes in the 1980s when all the four objectives had been retired in substantial measure. The focus shifted from ***access*** to ***quality***; from the ***broadcast*** to ***cassette***; from ***information*** to ***interaction***.
The Computer made a lot of difference to the teaching-learning strategies to be followed in the DOL systems.
In the 1990s although the core concerns of the previous two decades were at the centre of their activities, the institutions had to confront a new set of developments and challenges in the forms of globalisation, unipolar world order dominated by the market (even in countries like China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea), the collapse of state controlled socialist regimes in the former USSR and the Eastern Europe, the high-tech Gulf war, devastating floods, famines and civil wars in Africa, Asia and Latin America, the emergence of virtual colleges/universities thanks to the revolutionary changes brought in by the computing-telecommunicational technologies, the sudden irrelevance of huge investments on the traditional type of infrastructure of educational institutions, the changing roles of universities - in fact, education as such - the decreasing role of the state in providing education to the community (and, ironically, its growing control over universities in the name of accountability), the growing influence of the market, and the "self-supportive" or self-financing noose tightening the neck of the academia (self-financing noose refers to the present policy of the government(s) that asks the universities to generate their own income--which means reduction or stopping of state funding), the intellectually emaciated, malnourished academic community that refuses to realise its social and moral authority by lending itself to be punched and kicked around so long as its salary is assured, the directionless wanderings of the students who don't know how to navigate and where to sail, sudden changes of curricula and syllabi to meet the demands of the job markets, the uprooting and total neglect of liberal education, sudden reversals of goals of education, the invisible bout powerful hands of the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organisation in the "structural adjustments" of the governments' policies towards education at different levels - all these and many more such developments of the 1990s forced the educational thinkers and policy makers to rethink about the limits of democratisation and egalitarianism of educational institutions in general, and the distance teaching institutions in particular.

Certain inconvenient-questions regarding the original missions of institutions and their actual practices under the pressure of the market forces had to be asked, although the general claim that DOL is a democratising strategy had to be still maintained with a certain sense of ambivalence and genuine confusion on the part of the distance education leaders. Ian McDonald (2001) articulates some of the high risks that DOL has to face in the era of market dominated education while it attempts to increase the access, equity and quality of education (see 5th Prof. G. Ram. Reddy Memorial Lecture, Indira Gandhi National Open University and the Commonwealth of Learning, July 2001).

When every social agenda is in a state of flux, educational missions cannot simply be taken as definite and stable. But they cannot, at the same time, be changed to suit the convenience of politicians and bureaucrats who would like to treat educational institutions as extensions of ministerial departments. For these reasons, institutional missions have to be reviewed and restated with clear understanding of the new developments and their implications for the institutions concerned.

2. Need for a review of institutional structures and governance

In the management and governance of distance teaching institutions of the developing countries, a thorough, critical review of institutional structures and the composition of the various statutory bodies is imperative in order to invigorate the functioning of the institutions with a measure of academic freedom and creativity. At the time of establishing the open universities in India, for example, there were no tested models of management and governance of the open universities. Therefore the culture and thinking that govern and manage the open universities until today is that of a conventional university although often claims are made about the "uniqueness" of the open universities as universities with a difference. The regulations and the norms prescribed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) for the conventional face to face universities have generally been applied in the case of open universities also. Although IGNOU has to perform the apex role for the DOL system through a mechanism called "Distance Education Council" (DEC) established in 1992, so far the primary function of "co-ordination and determination of standards of distance education" in the country has not been initiated in a scientific and professional manner. This is so, mainly because of lack of charity and institutional will to activate DEC in the manner it should be allowed to function.

DEC's role, status and functions have clearly been stated in the decisions of the supreme governing body of IGNOU - the Board of Management. But the decisions have so far remained as decisions on paper. This is an expression and consequence of the traditional thinking and culture that permeates in the governance of open universities much to the detrimental effect on the new system whose potential cannot unfold under the traditional culture of the campus based universities. Ironically, DEC which is to be treated as one of the *authorities* of IGNOU is practically reduced to the status of a service Division of the university, mainly because of the prevailing institutional climate which awaits more charity of thinking and assertion of statutory bodies which are the life-lines of university autonomy and self-governance.

But DEC is not the only victim of traditional thinking. IGNOU has created different institutional structures such as the Schools of Studies, service Divisions, academic Divisions, an Institute called the Staff Training and Research Institute of Distance Education (STRIDE), the Centre for Extension Education (CEE), the Electronic Media Production Centre (EMPC), but the status, the role and functions of each of these are often interpreted incorrectly. The vulnerability of the institution is such that a particular unit gets its importance or suffers, depending on the moods of senior managers and the lobbies which influence them. Informal feedback and the literature on the subject show that almost all the open universities of the developing world suffer from the same type of problems of adhocism and lack of firm policies.

This may be true of institutions in the developed countries as well, but in the case of developing countries such an approach will further marginalize the democratisation of education because it is very easy to manipulate the statutory bodies of the open universities, ignore the decisions of the same bodies and impose autocratic decisions

of powerful individuals because, in the absence of students on the campus, it is easy to create groups with conflicting interests and manage them. The only safeguard perhaps against such dangers is to change the composition of all the statutory bodies to accommodate more representatives of the enlightened public, the students, parents, trade union leaders and the heads of academic units that have to perform special functions - such as setting standards, quality assurance, staff development, research, media and technology policy making etc..

The Open University of the United Kingdom (OUUK) was viewed as a model by many of the open universities of the Asian countries, including IGNOU of India, but the adoption of the model was rather superficial. The democratic culture of the OUUK or the academic pride of the FernUniversität of Germany have not so far attracted the managers of the open universities in Asia. Perhaps, they (the managers) are too scared to highlight them! Both OUUK and FernUniversität have governing bodies with representation of students, the public and the trade unions. But Indian open universities are yet to open their statutory bodies to students and others. Many of the administrative drawbacks and quality deficiencies can easily be overcome by the open universities by simply allowing the student's representatives and the representatives of the public to participate in the decision making process. This is possible, only by changing the *composition* of statutory bodies, particularly the governing/executive councils of the open universities in the developing countries. Much of the inbreeding, parasitism and manipulations can be done away with, when the real state holders like the students and the public are allowed to see how open the open universities really are, and how genuine are they in fulfilling their social mission as catalysts of educational and social change. The fear of being found out must be removed from the governance of open universities of the developing world, if democratisation of education through DOL has to strike roots, and this can be done effectively by democratising the statutory bodies of these institutions.

It would be appropriate to bare in mind some of the crucial issues raised in this regard by the UNESCO document on "Autonomy, social Responsibility and Academic Freedom" (1998)

> "A society based on risk-taking requires greater latitude to be accorded to institutions so that the individuals baring responsibility for the good husbandry, may exercise initiative in meeting the often changing demands society places on higher education. From this point of view, university autonomy has to content and find a balance, with other principles which determine its relationship with society, namely accountability, social responsibility and transparency... To be in a position to do so, however, it is incumbent on the university to develop techniques of management, administration and self-verification which balance university autonomy with the obligation to be accountable to society, to demonstrate efficiency in fulfilling its mission and transparency in its manner of achieving it..."
>
> "Rights confer obligations. Academic freedom and university autonomy naturally imply the obligations to excellence, to innovation and to the advancement of knowledge, the former by individual academics and the latter by the institution. Academic freedom and the

> university autonomy have tended to be regarded as a protection vis a vis arbitrary interference and are underwritten by formal legislature enactment or by the State's recognising the customary practices of the academic community..."
>
> "... Academic freedom and the University Autonomy are prior conditions for the unfettered pursuit and dissemination of knowledge. They are bestowed upon the academic community not for its own sake but to enable the university to meet its responsibilities to society." (pp. 6-7).

If academic freedom and university autonomy are not correctly interpreted and taken seriously by the open universities in Asia, then what Otto Peters (1973) said about the negative consequences of industrialised form of teaching - learning cannot be escaped. Peters says:

> "...dominant political groups might easily cease power or by increasing their influence not only in the administration, industry, military, and the transport and communications systems, but also through a centralised industrialised system of education. *Such a system would fit easily within an interrelated and integrated mega-organisation, and could be used to manipulate people in a subtle but efficient way. There is the danger that people would become more and more instrumentalised in such a system."* (Keegan 1994, pp. 196-197).

3. Need to evaluate the existing methods of teaching-learning and support systems

Teaching-learning-strategies being followed by the open universities call for immediate review. Experience shows that at least three different approaches are being adopted by the institutions with regard to development of instructional source materials.

a) course team approach (in all its variations in the composition of the teams) popularised by the British Open University,

b) total content contribution by the individual academies or the internal faculty as practised by the Professors at the FernUniversitat, Germany, and

c) total reliance on external course writers working in the conventional universities for their academic reputation and content contribution.

The third approach seems to be the dominant feature of course development in a number open universities in India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, despite the fact that these open universities have recruited the "core faculty" for the different academic disciplines on a permanent basis. (This is very different - from the consortium made of distance teaching which gets the courses developed by external authors on contractual basis, and makes the source materials available to learners.

There is no claim to "teaching" or any academic credit in this case.). But the open universities with a large number of "core faculty" and yet relying almost entirely on external, conventional academics for content contribution is an altogether different strategy that has serious academic, pedagogic, sociological and ethical implications for the future educational strategies. How?

In the course team approach as followed by the Open University, UK, the composition of the team is formalised. The chairperson of the team is always an internal academic with power and academic prestige. Though the team may have varying number of academics (both internal and external), a media producer, an editor and a line manager, it is the Course Team Chairperson who takes complete responsibility for the *quality* and *credibility* of his/her course. The external course writers contribution has to pass through the quality check by the course team and the final approval of the chairperson of the course team. Thus, the chairperson accepts the full responsibility for the quality of the course concerned. The OUUK also encourages research of different types. Individuals, departments, Institute of Educational Technology (IET) etc., are charged with the responsibility to conduct discipline based and systemic research. Thus, course contribution and research are the *primary* functions of the teaching staff, and the unity of (distance) teaching and research is upheld by the Open University -.

In the FernUniversität, the Professors develop their own courses. In fact, they refuse to teach courses developed by others because they consider it unacademic and an insult to their intellectual authority to teach or "coordinate" courses created by others. It is this academic pride and creative urge of teachers that has earned fame to FernUniversitat besides their ability to teach their learners through distance mode. Another important feature of academic excellence of the FernUniversität is the place and importance of research - both discipline based and systemic. Otto Peters says:

> "The FernUniversität has become a remarkable place of scientific research and teaching. Its professors are well known in their disciplines, as a number of honourable calls to chairs of great universities rich in tradition inside and outside the Federal Republic shows. They have varying contacts with universities in other countries and are familiar with the international trends in their disciplines. They take part in international research projects and also ... as visiting and exchange professors abroad."
>
> "The research activities of the FernUniversität are to my mind the reason for its acceptance by the scientific community. This distinguishes it from some distance teaching universities in which no research is conducted." (Desmond Keegan [1994] Ed. Otto Peters on Distance Education: The Industrialisation of Teaching and Learning. Routledge London & New York, pp. 184 - 185)

The open universities in the developing countries, because of their near total reliance on external conventional academics for the contribution of content and a near total preoccupation with low level administrative tasks suffer from twin academic indignities: lack of intellectual authority and an intellectual incapacity to teach and

conduct research. Strangely but tragically they consider these indignities as "academic freedom". Citing the tight deadlines, inexperience in writing instructional materials and the pressing administrative responsibilities involved in the development and production of course materials, they willingly accept the easy roles of "co-ordinators" of courses and programmes.

"Co-ordination" in the context of the developing countries means contacting authors, editors, printers and at times dispatchers of materials. It could be equivated with the job of a "line-manager" of the OUUK course team. It doesn't have any academic flavour. By remaining a "co-ordinator" of this kind, an academic reduces his/her status to that of an academic "manager" in the pejorative sense. This status keeps the open university academic busy with minor managerial tasks that can be handled by clerical staff, perhaps more efficiently. In the long run, the academic neither contributes to the course development and distance teaching nor participates in the research of any kind, as long periods of academic inactivity and laziness deprive him/her of the necessary intellectual vigour, sharpness and enthusiasm to contribute to teaching and research. This would mean slow but sure death of intellect in academics who would inevitably accquire the habits of absenteeism, gossip and politicking. Such an academic stagnation promotes mediocrity which, in turn, encourages parasitism and bureaucratic control in distance teaching institutions.

Mediocrity strives to shine in the borrowed light of the borrowed academic content from those very 'conventional' academics known for their expertise in their own academic disciplines but criticised by the 'open ' university academic on grounds of the former's inability to 'understand' and teach through distance mode: But the real danger in this process is that it (the mediocrity) willy-nilly drives out academic excellence. Academic deterioration will, then, have come a full circle. The criticism of the previous decades against correspondence education on the grounds of low quality will get another lease of life, this time to denigrate distance education system as a whole, which, when it happens, will certainly retard the growth of a potentially democratic innovative system of education.
The pedagogic, sociological and ethical consequences that flow from the borrowed content are far more serious than the unconscious or willing academic denigration of teachers of the open universities of the developing world.

Pedagogically, teachers who do not create their own courses will not recognise the content which they are supposed to co-ordinate, and least of all will be able to teach through new methods. This has already happened in those institutions where marking of assignments and exams scripts, tutoring and counselling, etc., are being done by part time teachers who hold permanent jobs in the conventional universities and colleges. This further reduces the academic relevance of having "core faculty" whose only concerns seem to be salaries and promotions without intellectual contribution.

Students will have no contact with their teachers whose names are printed on the credit pages of the course materials. Updating and revision of materials will not be easy. When such activities are initiated, the "core faculty" will again look up to the 'conventional' teachers to do the job, because the latter were the original contributors of the academic contents, which means further borrowing of content from the "conventional" classroom teachers without any returns from the "innovative"

distance teachers. The peak of this irony is the cry for more "academic freedom", "less work loads" and "more opportunities for research", which in reality often means, "no work", "more pay" and "better promotional ...". Instances are not rare in some open universities which "promote" academics to the ranks of professors, who would not have written a signal unit/lesson or published a single paper! Nothing can be more insulting to the profession of teaching! Nothing can be more injurious to the health of the academic culture of an open university when it chooses to seal the thinking minds in the process of opening the education to the society.

The above situation would be used by bureaucrats and the funding agencies to further marginalize the open universities by reducing their academic status to the level of "teaching shops" or corporate houses who will do every thing to increase their incomes and profit in the name of selling educational services. Under the pressure of market forces and globalisation, open universities have already come under pressure to generate their own resources. University managements do not fill the vacant academic positions. In fact they seem to be unconcerned about what the faculty does or does not do, so long as there are external course writers and partner institutions to help in their managerial process of teaching at a distance. Further, governments drastically reduce their funding of open universities, and tell the campus based face to face universities to emulate the examples of open universities to generate their own incomes. Academics are encouraged to take up projects without having regard for the core functions of a university: teaching, research and extension. Often projects are to be managed with external temporary staff without any academic contributions of project leaders. The questions to be asked are:

- When the conventional academics contribute the content, teach the distance learners through tutorials, assignments, etc. , what do the distance teachers do?
- If the open universities appoint teachers to merely "coordinate" the managerial and administrative activities, what will happen to them as institutions of higher learning whose reputation rests on the quality of their faculty and the staff?
- How can the teachers be expected to retain and improve their quality, when they do not have to teach or research?

There are no simple answers. The open universities have already suffered much because of their blind copying of successful foreign/western models. Perhaps they would not have suffered much, had they copied the foreign models in full and comprehensively. It becomes clear, that the copying has been a superficial one. Any rationalisation of this superficial copying can not wish away the sad reality the reality of existence of distance teaching institutions awaiting infusion of some fresh, genuine academic blood in all their activities. Inner strength of academic institutions flows from the heart of the intellectual capacity of their own faculty. In the absence of strong academic communities, open universities face greater danger of succumbing to the pressure of the market in the era of so called globalisation. Jegede and Shive (2001) are fully justified in their warning:

> "...unless Asia's open universities move quickly to master new technologies and assure quality in their programmes, campus-based dual mode universities, ever hungry in this new climate (of information technology and globalisation), will grasp the new tools of distance learning and move aggressively into the regions of adult and continuing professional education once largely left to open universities and marginal private providers. In ten years' time will the open universities of Asia have continued to grow exponentially into mega universities, or will they be overtaken by dual-mode institutions, private and public, separately or in new consortia, which will have used their academic and managerial assets to expand their programmes to serve this growing population of learners?" (O.Tegede and G. Shive (eds):Open and Distance Education in the Asia Pacific Region, Open University of Hongkong Press, 2001, pp.3 - 4).

Ten years is, perhaps, too long a time. Distance teaching universities of Europe, the Americas and Australia have already been very active in capturing the educational markets of the developing countries in a big way. Under the WTO agreements the developing countries, including the countries which have mega universities (e. g. India) are going to open their doors to foreign universities and private educational providers. When this happens, the open universities which are still offering the second generation distance learning programmes are going to face tough competition and lose many of their potential learners who, through their course fees, are keeping the open universities alive. Quality and technology based new academic programmes can be developed quickly, only if the academics of the open universities are prepared to create their own programmes. Staff development programmes of a new type are imperative in this regard. But what will happen, if the academics ... inactive and complacent and allow opportunities to drift away from their hands?

4. Need to recognise the potential of Information Communication Technologies(ICT) and evolve appropriate policies for Distance Open Learning.

The very act of establishing open universities was considered to be an achievement in the 1970s (the United Kingdom, Federal Republic of Germany, Netherlands, Pakistan, Thailand) and in the 1980s (India, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh). Now, questions are being asked whether single mode distance teaching institutions of the fordist type with huge bureaucracies are the right type to serve the ever growing demand for extremely complex, customised educational programmes. Neofordist approach recommends small, sleek and efficient organisations to produce goods to meet the demand for variety. A similar approach is also seen as relevant in offering distance learning programmes with the growing use of Information and Communicational Technologies (ICT). The structure, staffing pattern and management styles of open universities have to change quickly, if they have to benefit from ICT. To appreciate the benefits of ICT, simplistic changes like buying hundreds of computers and other hardware will not do. In the first place, open universities must create a culture - an IT culture - that will use the technology appropriately and meaningfully.

Ironically, the institutional leaders who decide to bring in ICT in a big way rather suddenly, do so without preparing the actual users for the intended change. Secondly, ICT is narrowly understood as the use of sophisticated latest computers and digital

technologies only. The wide range of technology such as the broadcast, cassettes etc., are forgotten, even when there is a big need to use them creatively. As a result, there is always a misunderstanding about the meaning of ICT and doubts about the policies and decisions to induct technologies of different types. Where huge investments are made without considerations of affordability, use and, above all, accessibility to learners, genuine doubts are expressed by some about the intentions of institutional leaders who make such decisions.

Institutional leaders must be alive to both external and internal environments when they make decisions about technologies. While the potential of ICT to enhance access, flexibility of learning, academic interaction etc., it is absolutely necessary for the community, particularly the university community to see the appropriateness of the choice of technologies. How will the institutions justify heavy costs of technology based instructional source materials, if the materials are not at all used by the learners? For example, in a number of open universities in South Asia, audio-video programmes prepared with much fanfare and unjustifiably huge expenditure are not being used by the learners.

They are just there in the study centres gathering dust or growing fungus literally. But the policies to have a certain number of audios and videos per course continue, and production of audio and video goes on, like a conveyer belt moves on even when there is nothing to "convey". Such ritualistic and mechanical approaches to, and the lack of understanding of the multi-media of the previous decades or of the present ICT will result in poor use of limited resources available to educational purposes in the developing countries. How do institutional leaders allow such things to continue, without reviewing the educational use or effectiveness of the media or technology based learning source materials for years, and sometimes decades together?

Success and failure, achievements and shortcomings in the practices of distance education in the developing countries flow from the same source, as they do elsewhere: the socio-academic climate. In an environment where even small beginnings have to be made in the midst of scepticism, opposition and discouragement, professionalism is viewed with disfavour. The institutional leaders, even when they are fully aware of wasteful expenditure or misuse of resources cannot act resolutely because of external and internal pressures.

Decisions made once are allowed to continue, because a review of them would reveal certain startling realities which may not be liked by some "powerful" individuals and lobbies whose interests may be affected by the revelation of certain facts. Every effort may be made by such individuals to convince the institutional leaders that everything goes on well. This willing suspension of recognising simple realities is part of the psychological make up of leaders who are sustained by a false sense of success, much in the same way politicians try to hold on to their positions, often false, till the last moment. When the entire nations are permeated by such false consciousness, it is difficult for institutional leaders to bring in professionalism in all the activities of their institutions. But this is no excuse for doing incorrect things repeatedly and continuously.

Institutional leaders must be acutely aware of their environment, and the consequences of their policies and actions. Elsewhere, I have discussed the need to consider a range of quality issues at the very beginning of establishing distance teaching universities in the developing countries (Ramanujam, P. R., 1999). In the case of formulating policies of ICT, the leaders have to carefully weigh the different options available to them before they commit heavy investments to a particular technology.

Although A. W. Bates has repeatedly asserted that no medium is superior or inferior to any other in its capacity to impart knowledge, the fact remains that when new developments take place in the communicational media, the tendency on the part of distance teaching institutions is to experiment with the new media. This is particularly true of media enthusiasts who believe that high-tech media can solve problems that pedagogy has not been able to solve so far. In their enthusiasm and sincere belief to do 'something' they tend to forget the prerequisites for introducing a new technology.
Eventually they divert much of the resources to back ICT programmes. When the going becomes tough, instead of reviewing their own work critically, they blame the critics for being "negative minded and "old fashioned". In the process the more traditional media like the printbased resource materials would have been neglected, and the ICT projects would have been kept in suspended animation.
Informal feedback would show what a horrendous waste the universities could have avoided, and this would be accepted by the leaders too in their private talks but would be forcefully defended in public speeches. These pitfalls and gropings in the dark, inspite of the camera lights, could be avoided, if ICT policies, if there are any, are guided by sound pedagogic principles, or at least by common sense.

In the first place, institutional leaders must have a realistic understanding of the potential of ICT, particularly the digital information communication, in enhancing interactive distance learning. Secondly, they must involve teachers, media-technical staff and the learners in evolving a policy. ...Thirdly, which is crucial in the context of the developing countries, the costs of ICT should be considered in terms of their educational effectiveness. While commenting on the potential of digital information and communication, Otto Peters (2001)makes the following observations which have much relevance to the open universities of the developing world as well:

> "The discussion of the role of digital information and communication media and the many approaches for testing them are still therefore dealing with the future of distance education. Nobody knows what it will be possible to create for financial, logistical, pragmatic or even pedagogical reasons. We should remind ourselves of the complicated and enormously expensive measures that have to be taken to hold audio or video conferences. We should also ask ourselves how quickly participants will adjust to the completely different group experience of telefonconferencing, with its completely different learning climate. Will the innovations be welcomed only by technology nerds, but rejected by the mass of student? And will the professors who actively take part be merely a small group that is open to ideas for the future and regards the change as necessary, while the majority shy away from innovations and adhere to traditional forms of teaching? It will

> be some time before distance education actually makes use of these new technological opportunities, and some obstacle will have to be overcome along the way" (p. 130).

In a recent analysis of the comparative costs of different media components used for open learning, Thomas Hülsmann (2000) reports:

> "A book may cost £ 20.000 to write and to produce and occupy a reader for forty hours. A television programme may last only for an hour but may cost £ 120000 to create. The respective costs per learning hour are: £ 120000 per hour for television and £ 500 per hour for the book" (p. 10).

The above findings need serious consideration when open universities think of using ICT, especially when they decide to offer on-line courses or back up print based materials with television broadcasts and video cassettes. If the open universities of the developing countries fail to meet the three requirements mentioned earlier - i.e. a clear policy, an appropriate institutional culture, and the consideration of costs - they may do a few things in their enthusiasm to be "up to date" or catch up with their counterparts in the developed world, but very soon may be frustrated when they find the going tough.

What should, then, the open universities in the developing world do?

Should they simply sit back and watch the new developments?

Should they only wait for the western open universities to dump their course materials in the local educational markets, not only to do business but also to recolonise the developing world?
Or is there a possibility for the open universities in the developing world to develop their own models of ICT?

The third option very much exists, if only the institutional leaders operate with the necessary vision, commitment and a sense of realism. One gets the feeling that in many developing countries, it is not always the money that is in shortage, but the intellectual discipline, organisational culture and the self confidence to do things. India, for example is already seen as a soft-ware superpower, and the Indian professionals contribute substantially to the IT industries of the USA, UK, Japan, Germany and other countries.

There is also a necessary IT culture among the students and service personnel if not all among the academics. Some of the districts in the Southern Indian States have already been brought under e-governance. Even some non-literate farmers have started using the IT to find out the market for their produce. Thousands of students are literally deserting the departments of Humanities, Sciences and Social Sciences in search of IT courses offered by mushrooming private colleges of engineering throughout India. Substantial foreign exchange is flowing into the country through the software.

And yet, educational institutions, including the distance teaching ones have not seized the initiative in order to make use of the available technology for meeting the national educational goals. Whatever has been done in this sector has been done by individuals and private institutions. The public funded educational institutions are woefully lagging behind the private sector, although access to IT hardware is not a big problem for many colleges and universities. In some states like Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Delhi substantial progress has been made in providing computers, televisions and radios to schools, but at the national level, a comprehensive IT policy is yet to emerge.

The devide between technology and pedagogy is as serious as the knowledge gap that exists in the open universities of the developing world. There is everything that the open universities can hope for - material resources, human power and the intellectual resources (though dormant), and yet the expected educational reform in the real sense does not take place, although the exponential growth of enrolments and the number courses is very much a reality. Why?

Leonardo da Vinci's painting of "God's inspiration to man" perhaps can provide part of the answer. The open university academic is yet to be inspired either by the institutional head - God or by the IT God. The institutional head does not know how to breathe life into the academic, and the IT God cannot inspire the academic until s/he touches the keyboard of a computer. When neither happens, the premordial "chaos" continues, waiting for some "order" to be created. Since the God in heaven cannot descend to the open university campuses of the developing world, the men and the women working in them alone can create the necessary order. And the strategy to create that order is staff development.

5. Need to create the necessary academic environment through staff development programmes.

Staff development through training, retraining, research, exposure to other educational institutions, seminars, conferences, exchange visits, visiting fellowships etc. is essential to maintain the quality of the open university staff. From the tune of their entry to the end of their career, the staff have to continuously improve their knowledge, understanding and performance in time with the changing needs of the institution in which they work but also to meet the larger needs of the society. The staff, particularly the academic staff have a moral and ethical responsibility to alert the institutions and help them shape their policies towards better social accountability, democratic governance, spirit of enquiry with a commitment to truth and promotion of allround development of the society and the individual.

The present tendency of the universities, particularly, the open universities is to measure their success in terms of numbers of students enrolled, the amount of fee collected, the amount of money earned through projects, sale of books etc.. Nothing can be more erroneous and dangerous than such a notion of success of the universities. The goals of the universities cannot be subservient to the economic goals of the industry or the government. Although the universities should seriously consider the relationship between education and work, be aware of the need to consider the employment of the graduates etc., they cannot reduce their goals to

merely meeting the needs of the employers and the markets. Among other principles that govern the universality of higher education the following are also listed as important in the Working Document of UNESCO on higher education: "Towards an Agenda 21 for Higher Education":

> "One of the most important missions of higher education in society is its cultural and ethical mission. Higher education is required to preserve and accept cultural identity, promote the propagations and creation of cultural values, protect and encourage cultural diversity and participate actively in the development of intercultural understanding and harmony and the mutual enrichment of cultures. The transmission of cultural values, which is bound up with ethical considerations, should permeate all courses in higher education..."
>
> "The interaction of higher education with the state, parliament and the government seems particularly important, as also with the world of work, productive sector, industry, service sector, business and the media, which thus have a share of responsibility for the situation of higher education, its development, renewal and improvement."(pp6-7)

Through staff development, the cardinal principles of higher education can be kept alive and vibrant by the open universities as well. If they fail in this most important duty, then, the staff will have little value and less relevance to the institutions that feeds them and the society that nurtures them. Just as the quality of a university is known by the quality of its staff, its success is also measured by the success of the staff, particularly the teaching staff.

If an open university is criticised for not promoting an academic and research environment, it is an admission that its teachers are not serious about or not capable enough to carryout quality teaching and research. If university is viewed as a substandard and mediocre one, it only means that the staff are substandard and mediocre. If the heads of the institutions do not care for academic excellence, it means that the staff do not generate the necessary awareness of and concern for academic excellence.

Intellectual impotence, moral cowardice and material corruption go together in institutions of higher learning everywhere in the world. If this trend has to be arrested in the open universities of the developing countries, then, two things must happen without any further delay:

a) the institutional leaders must think and act keeping in view the social goals of the institutions, and not in terms of what they can get from their three year or five year terms as Presidents, Rectors and Vice-Chancellors; and
b) the teachers must think beyond their salary, promotion and gossip and act as the socially evolved and intellectually sensitive members of the society.

If neither happens, the invasion of the more competent open universities of the developed countries cannot be stopped. In fact, the invasion has already begun. Very soon the inefficient open universities will become subservient to the efficient ones, and when it happens, distance educators of the losing countries will have none to blame but themselves.

The writing on the wall is very clear: *Distance Educators of the Developing Countries! Educate yourselves, before you teach others*!

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